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ABSTRACT

The inherent problems of affirmative action efforts have been compounded in recent years by new ones: increasing difficulty for administrators to take risks: severe problems in predominantly black colleges brought about by successful desegregation of predominantly white colleges: and divisiveness in minority communities. New opportunities also exist, since the pool of educated women and minorities has increased, and that group has an increased awareness of its political clout. It is important now not only to maintain the base of affirmative action programs already existing, but also to superimpose a new concept that encourages institutions to act more positively rather than simply try to correct previous imbalances and problems. Programs should be structured to concentrate on the most motivated individuals and institutions, and to provide incentives rather than disincentives. A new sense of purpose and a new strategy for action are essential to all these efforts (MSE)

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CAN THERE BE ANYTHING AFFIRMATIVE ABOUT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN THE 1980's *

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Recently I was privileged with the help of the Lilly Endowment to meet in a beautiful and secluded setting in Rhode Island with a small group from around the country. All of those who attended the meeting share a common concern, namely that we must address the current state of affirmative action in higher education.

Rhode Island is in many ways an ideal place for such a discussion. Not only does it have the unusual status of having been created by this country's first attempt at affirmative action, but it is also characterized by an urgent need to rethink what the terms "equality of opportunity" and "affirmative action" mean for the 1980's.

While I do not purport to speak for the group, I am indebted to them for the opportunity to plagiarize their ideas. I can say that we all shared a deeply held sense that higher education in this country must generate both a new approach and a new sense of purpose with regard to affirmative action - now.

In the decade following Martin Luther King's death in 1967, American higher education undertook extensive efforts at affirmative action, first to insure opportunities for minorities, then for women, as well. Considering the normal half-life of issues in American life, it has held our sustained attention over a considerable time.

Now, however, as we approach the boundary line of the 1980's, two major problems have come to light. The first, is that we are now far enough along to see how difficult affirmative action can be. In retrospect it is apparent that some aspects of affirmative action could be accomplished by relatively straightforward approaches. Most of these aspects have largely been achieved. Many other aspects, however, have proved far more intractable. We are now left with those tasks that are far more complicated and stubborn than had originally been perceived, for which no easy solutions are in sight.

It has proven far easier to help James Meredith past the Governor and into the University of Mississippi than it has to increase the number of black faculty.

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It has proven easier to increase the number of women attending schools of business than the number of women deans of schools of business.

The second, and more worrisome problem, is that affirmative action is losing momentum. Not only is there a clear slowing of the investment of energy and resources but the statistics show a slowdown in results as well. One has the sense these days that the public and the higher education community are questioning whether or not we may have done enough or even gone too far. This may in part be simply one facet of a broader public mood of questioning anything that appears to be related to welfare, or a part of the broader questioning the extensive use of government regulations to achieve social ends.

It may, though, have more to do with other concerns that are more specific to affirmative action. As new groups entered the lists and made their case for public action, (the handicapped or the elderly, for example) the result has been to water down the issue. This is not to say that these are not legitimate and overdue concerns. On the contrary, it is their legitimacy that causes the problem, for when everyone is special, no one is special.

Affirmative action is also afflicted with the myth of progress, the public's sense that a great deal has been accomplished, that we've done what was required, and that it is time now to return to our everyday concerns. And to some extent, the public may be bored with the issue.

Whatever the cause, the result has been a loss of momentum and sense of purpose. Yet I would argue that this is just the wrong time to lose momentum. Perhaps there is never an appropriate time, but now, as we enter the 1980's as several critical new elements of the problem are just becoming evident, it seems a particularly wrong time.

At the very time that interest is waning in the education of minorities, the composition of the nation's population is shifting rapidly. The minority population is growing at an unprecedented rate. In addition to the rapidly growing black population, there is an even faster growth of several Hispanic populations. The high levels of immigration, legal and illegal, mean that the Census estimates of 12 million Hispanics are surely already substantially understated. Their combined growth adds a new dimension to the ever changing nature of the American population, as there is now such a large segment whose native language is Spanish rather than English. The recent history of the difficulties of people living comfortably together while sharing two languages should, if nothing else, remind us of the importance of affirmative efforts in education.

For women as well, the 1980's will be a time of confrontation and crisis. By the 1970's women clearly had new and expanded aspirations. More than half of the population of women was working and more and more saw the importance of a better education. Ever, larger numbers of motivated and educated women are moving into professional and administrative careers, and acceptance in the lower and middle levels of the hierarchy has been rapid. But as of this time, there has been almost no progress in penetrating the upper middle and upper levels

of the establishment world. For that matter, there has been little progress in the equalization of salaries. A confrontation is in the offing as this flood tide of ambitious women come up against the barriers of resistance to their progress in salary and position.

By raising the subjects of both minorities and women, I do not mean to imply that the problem in both cases is similar or even close to similar. They are different, very different. Even the term "minorities" cannot do justice to the differences between Blacks and Hispanics nor can "Hispanics" adequately describe the differences of the Chicanos from the Puerto Ricans or the Puerto Ricans from the Cubans. It is increasingly difficult in discussing affirmative action to find adequate terminology, and increasingly urgent to create a concept of affirmative action that allows and encourages differing approaches appropriate to differing needs. A major flaw in our current approach is that it assumes that the same basic approach can successfully be applied to all affected parties.

How can we find a new concept or the necessary new approaches to succeed with affirmative action in the 1980's? Perhaps an important point at which to start is the recognition that the efforts of the last decade have produced some progress. It is worth reviewing what we have and what we have not accomplished in our two basic tasks:

- The education of women and minorities in order that they may have access to whatever level of participation in the careers of society they choose.

- The opportunity provided to women and minorities by colleges and universities in their roles of both employers and role models.

First, with regard to minorities, the improvement in the enrollment statistics just since 1970 is impressive. The minorities share has increased from 8% to 13%. In absolute numbers, enrollment for Blacks has doubled, for Chicanos it has more than doubled, for Puerto Ricans it has tripled, and for Native Americans it has quintupled. Well over a million minority students now attend American colleges and universities.

Perhaps the most striking way to describe these gains is to say that essentially every college and university in the country has been opened to minorities and that in almost two thirds of them minorities represent at least 10% of the enrollment.

The share of the professionals in the work force has, (since 19___, increased doubled.
from___% to ____%.) For this and other reasons, more minority families are making it economically. For example, as of last year approximately 30% of black families had incomes above $15,000.

Similarly, the enrollment statistics for women show progress. The share of women entering college is steadily approaching that for men. The number of women entering graduate and professional schools is up sharply as well. The number of women choosing to follow careers has risen steadily for those decades. More than half of the women in the traditional working age group are now in the work force and they are choosing to work a longer segment of their lives.

Despite the tightness of the times in terms of faculty hiring, the share of full-time faculty who are women and the share of those with tenure who are women has increased only slightly. Women now constitute just over a quarter of the full-time faculty at colleges and universities.

And we should not forget another accomplishment. A base has been built for affirmative action with a legal framework in federal and state laws, and with programs within essentially all colleges and universities.

The difficulty lies in the fact that what has not been accomplished is at least as impressive as what has been accomplished.

For minorities, the increase in undergraduate and graduate enrollments has slowed. For blacks, the share of total enrollments actually declined slightly in the last few years. Similarly the share of all minorities entering medical school, as one critical example, has declined slightly.

Graduation rates from high school remain frustratingly lower for minority students. There are still far too few that have adequate backgrounds in science or mathematics so the clustering in the social sciences, business and in education continues. Attrition rates in college and in graduate school are higher. A much higher share attend community colleges and a smaller share attend universities.

The hiring of Black, Hispanic, and Native American faculty lags badly. One, but only one, cause is the slender number of new minority PhD's graduated each year. The growth in minority faculty is further hampered by what has become known euphemistically as the "tenure problem".

While women have made strong gains in the entry to and graduation from all sorts of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs, including many that were formerly all male, two major problems remain. The opportunity for good jobs and good salaries.

While the share of women on faculty has inched slowly upward, the number of women in senior administrative posts within universities and colleges has made essentially no gain in the last decade. Similar patterns have been found in business and government. In all three areas, a few important exceptions can be found. There is a woman president of the University of Chicago, a woman Mayor of Chicago, and women governors in Washington and Connecticut. These are significant if not numerous. In a country that has over one hundred and ten million women, this is not an avalanche. Not only has access to the best jobs proved elusive, but so has equal pay. Average earnings for women seem to be locked at about 60% of male earnings.

For both women and minorities the problem of most concern is that the whole process of affirmative action seems to be stalled. In certain ways, counter movements seem to have taken the initiative. From the courts we hear about Bakke, DeFunis, or Weber. Such cases, at least so far, have not created major legal problems for affirmative action. What they have done is let the steam out of the movement partly by reducing the fear of external (that is to say federal) action, and partly by creating a mood that seems to say times have changed.

But it is not only court cases. There is an intellectual assault from the right on the concept of affirmative action, arguing increasingly for a separation of non-discrimination from affirmative action. The Bakke case sharpened this argument by pitting against each other two critical principles, egalitarianism and merit, in a way that is difficult to resolve. In the daily life of the university one wonders whether this ambiguity has not become merely a vehicle for a courteous retreat from a difficult task.

If all these problems were not enough, affirmative action faces some new problems.

1. It is increasingly difficult for administrators in higher education to take risks. In periods of tight budgets and even retrenchment it is awkward if not impossible to use money incentives, such as the promise of new positions, as incentives for affirmative action goals. Department chairmen and deans, who are already overwhelmed by the task of educating faculties reared in the 50's and 60's to the realities of life in the 80's, are increasingly reluctant to spend their political capital to push for the hiring of a woman faculty member or the admission of a Chicano graduate student.

2. The success of desegregating the predominantly white colleges has led to an excruciating dilemma for the predominantly black colleges. While the extraordinary role black colleges play is clear, the legal and moral way to keep black colleges black while insuring that formerly white colleges are integrated is not clear. Nor is it clear how to go about assisting in the nurturing of the new Chicano, Puerto Ricans, and Native American colleges. Is it appropriate, or is it even possible -- considering the very different histories -- to evolve a set of colleges for these newly emergent minorities that could play the role that the black colleges with their long tradition continue to play?

3. There is a growing split in the minority communities between those who are making it and those who are not. But the assurance of minority success in a world of inflation and economic uncertainty is fragile. On which segment should public policy in higher education focus? Should our efforts be devoted to expanding the upwardly mobile group and solidifying their gains, leaving the problem of the least advantaged to others? Or should higher education, as it did a decade ago, attempt to reach out to everyone?

But, if there are new problems, there are new opportunities as well. For both minorities and women there is now a sizeable group of active and successful professionals whose ranks grow each year. They are increasingly aware of their political clout. If they persist, it is unlikely that society can or will resist their demands for a fuller role.

As the number of high school graduates begins to decline, starting next year, colleges and universities are likely to become more aggressive in their recruiting. A likely result is the improvement of minority access particularly in four-year institutions.

The rapidly improving job market for college graduates, and it will improve much more as we move into the 1980's, will mean strikingly better opportunities at the entry levels (except for teaching positions in the schools and faculty positions in higher education).

How can we capitalize on these advantages as well as all of the work of the last decade? How can we seize the opportunity that the moment presents? How can we turn our frustrations with slow current pace of affirmative action into something more dynamic, something that creates a sense of excitement and a regeneration of enthusiasm?

What formulation of the need, not based on guilt or on fear, but on justice and social benefit can be put forward to recapture the public's confidence and support?

Surely there are no simple answers to those questions. I have a few rudimentary ideas that may be worth exploring.

First, it is important that we maintain the base programs which are already built and which are aimed primarily at ending overt discrimination through the legal and regulatory process. That base of laws and programs has not proven itself able to address successfully the more difficult tasks ahead, but that is no reason to dismantle it. We need today's affirmative action as a ratchet to prevent us from slipping backward.

Beyond that, though, what we need is an entirely new concept, superimposed on top of our current concept of affirmative action. I am far from clear as to how to suggest that this can be done. It seems likely, however, that an essential element will be to refocus the affirmative part of our efforts at broadening the stream of those who are upwardly mobile through the vehicle of higher education. The primary goal on which national policy has been focused in recent years has been to insure that every college and university has a program that prevents discrimination and redresses imbalances in employment. It is primarily a focus on how to prevent institutions from doing anything wrong.

We need instead to get beyond the charade of complex and lengthy affirmative action programs and create some sort of effort that encourages institutions to do something right.

But such a concept requires new methods as well. I would suggest several.

First, programs ought to be structured to concentrate on the most motivated - the most motivated individuals and the most motivated institutions. We have been hobbled in the past by the insistence that every law and every program treat everyone the same. But our goal for <u>at least</u> some of what we do, should be maximum effectiveness - not equalness of action.

Let the base affirmative action insure that each and every institution comply with the minimum represented by the present laws and that each individual's rights are protected. Then let our new efforts focus on the greatest opportunities which are likely to be with those most interested in action.

Also, we need to focus our new efforts on incentive strategies not disincentive strategies. <u>Most</u> of our affirmative action efforts follow the model of OCR or EEOC. Why not create a competitive grant system, a Fund, modeled perhaps on FIPSE, to which interested and aggresive institutions can apply for funding

for ideas on how to increase the number of black students in engineering - or accelerate the number of women moving into senior positions. There are a few such efforts now, but the scale and the range of opportunity are far too limited.

Many other suggestions have been made.

1. We need to rethink the role of the affirmative action officer.

2. We need to consider means of creating a social audit comparable to our current financial audit.

3. We need to identify and publicize programs that have been effective.

No doubt we need to do these things and more. But most of all, we need a new sense of purpose, a new strategy, a new name for a concentration on assuring education and upward mobility for a much broader stream of American society, and a new sense of confidence that it can be done.